

# Connection

NEWSLETTER FOR THE WILLITS BYPASS PROJECT

WINTER 2001

## Status of the Draft EIR/EIS

Caltrans completed the Willits Bypass Administrative draft Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Impact Statement (EIR/EIS) in June 2001 and sent it to the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) for its review. The document includes two volumes. Volume 1 is the text describing the alternatives under consideration and the impacts associated with those alternatives. Volume 2 is an Environmental Atlas containing all the detailed maps for the document at 11"x 17" size.

We have received preliminary comments from FHWA and are modifying the document to address comments received to date. However, the document cannot be completed until formal comments are received. We anticipate public circulation to begin early next year.

The draft EIR/EIS will be available for public review at Mendocino County Libraries and at the Caltrans District Office in Eureka. We will also place the document on the Willits Bypass webpage (see address below) for public review and comment. Copies of the document will be sent to the organizations and individuals who have requested copies.

A public "Open House" style meeting on the draft EIR/EIS will be held in Willits. A notice of availability and the date of the public meeting will be published concurrently with distribution of the draft EIR/EIS. Comments may be made on the draft EIR/EIS either at

the public meeting or in writing before the end of the 60-day comment period. For a hard copy or compact disk of the draft EIR/EIS, send your request to:

*California Department of Transportation  
Caltrans Office of Environmental Management S-1  
2800 Gateway Oaks Drive, Suite 100  
Sacramento, CA 95833  
Attn: Nancy MacKenzie, Environmental Coordinator*

After the comment period, a preferred alternative will be selected based on comments received and an evaluation of the impacts. The final EIR/EIS presents the preferred alternative and identifies the impacts and mitigation measures for that alternative.



## Valley Alternatives are Truncated

In early 2001, Caltrans proposed shortening, or truncating, the three valley alternatives to conform more closely to existing funding. The truncated valley Alternatives; C1T, J1T and LT now end just north of their northerly interchanges and tie into existing U.S. 101 north of the Willits City limits.

Approximately \$117 million is currently programmed for construction and right of way for the Willits Bypass. Construction (including right of way) cost estimates for the three truncated valley alternatives range from \$128 to \$151 million. In addition to their



To provide flexibility in selecting a preferred alternative, we employed an evaluation procedure we referred to as a "nodal approach." This approach allows a segment of one alternative to be combined with a segment of another alternative to create a "hybrid alternative." The Alternatives Map shows where the dividing, or nodal, point for each alternative is located. By combining segments of alternatives, there are more possibilities for choosing a preferred alternative.

Alternative E3, the wetland avoidance alternative, has not been truncated. Its location as a western bypass alternative and the geography along its alignment do not lend themselves to shortening or combining with other truncated valley alternatives. Alternative E3 is presented in the draft EIR/EIS and has an estimated cost of \$301 million. All four "build" alternatives propose construction of a four-lane freeway with two travel lanes in each direction, a center grass median, and a design speed of 68 mph. For a detailed description of each alternative, please visit our webpage at: <http://www.dot.ca.gov/dist3/departments/planning/willits/willits.htm>

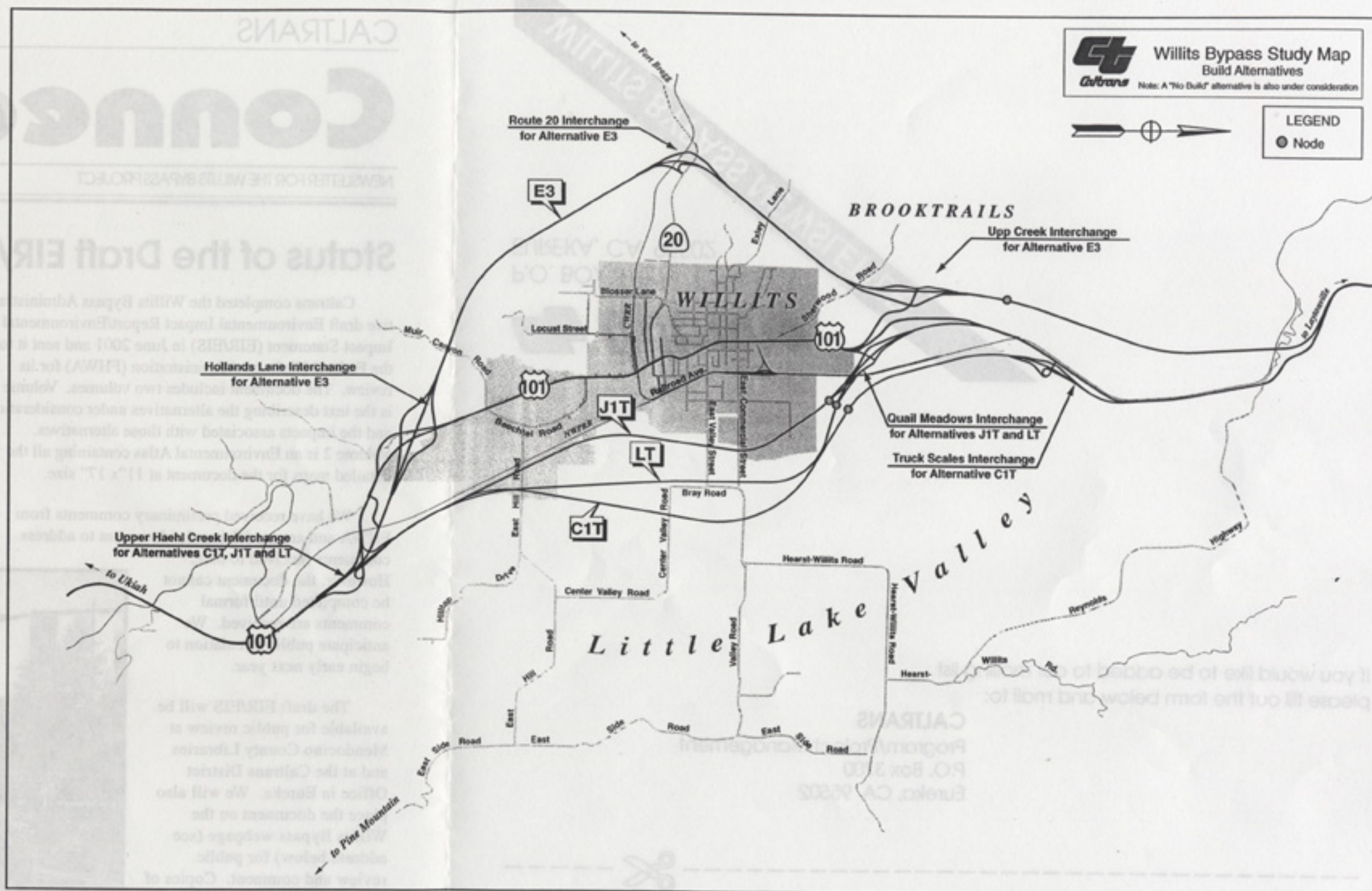
### Numerous Technical Studies were prepared for the Draft EIR/EIS

During preparation of the draft EIR/EIS, Caltrans staff and consultants prepared numerous technical studies to evaluate impacts associated with the proposed alternatives. The Historic Properties Survey Report is one of the studies prepared to evaluate cultural resources including historic architecture and pre-historic sites. The Transportation History of Willits insert was written by our Caltrans Architectural Historian and summarizes some of the research he completed to evaluate the historic significance of structures in Willits.

Please see the insert "A Transportation History of Willits"

### Elimination of the TSM Alternative

During preparation of the draft EIR/EIS, Caltrans Management considered but eliminated the Transportation System Management (TSM) alternative because it did not meet the project purpose and need. The TSM alternative would have operated as an arterial parallel to existing U.S. 101 and would have provided the least delay reduction of all the study alternatives. In addition, Alternative TSM was not expected to reduce the number



of collisions when compared with the No Build Alternative. The freeway study alternatives, however, are expected to provide a substantial reduction in collisions. Finally, the level of service provided by the TSM Alternative was not consistent with the level of service provided by the freeway alternatives.

Because of interest expressed by community members and a Project Development Team resource agency representative, Caltrans committed to fully studying the TSM alternative in the many technical studies developed to prepare the draft EIR/EIS. These studies revealed the significance of the environmental and community impacts

associated with the TSM alternative. The TSM alternative had the greatest impact to community housing stock. The alternative resulted in the removal of 140 residential units, including 104 single-family homes, 15 multi-family units and 21 mobile homes. In addition, 28 commercial, industrial, and non-profit businesses would have been relocated. There is not sufficient housing stock in Willits for the large number of residents who would have been displaced by the TSM alternative.

The TSM alternative was the only build alternative that resulted in unavoidable adverse impacts to eligible historic access in the vicinity. These impacts would likely have

modified the existing character of the area. Finally, the alternative also had the potential to physically divide the community of Willits and conflicted with the City's goal to provide a "livable, walkable" community.

*Design and layout by District 3 Multimedia*

